

INCARNATION IN THE WORLD OF TODAY Europe's Catholic Theological Heritage and its Future

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The study of present-day faith in the light of a sacramental presence in the world calling for life in the kingdom of God has been the main task of Catholic theology in the past few decades. What have been the results of performing this task and how to pursue it in the future? In the following papers, we would like to explore future perspectives on Catholic theology in Europe through a reconsideration of its recent past: its contexts, themes and protagonists.

If we mark that recent past from the Second Vatican Council to the present, then it is important to acknowledge that the cultural context in which European theology has developed has changed the tasks and challenges of Catholic theology.¹ A heightened sensibility to a changing cultural context is undoubtedly the consequence of the outcomes of the Council itself – a fact that has been discussed in an issue of *Bulletin ET*.² But the present transformations in theology are perhaps even more the effect of a changing university landscape and its delineation by supposedly secular boundaries, and of a world governed by a global economy uncomfortable with accommodating the conversations and conflicts of religiously diverse views and life styles.

In my opinion, Catholic theologians have responded to these cultural changes with some success and some failure. One of the successful outcomes of the Council's attention to the church's pastoral concern has been the theological discovery of a diversity of context-specific and practice-oriented questions, which connected situations of inequality, violence and suffering with theologies of justice and hope, speaking of a God who has engaged himself with the history and salvation of human beings. Furthermore, theology has continued to exchange methods and research results with other academic disciplines and has integrated these disciplines with its own topics and approaches. However,

¹ Cf. Paul Murray, *Roman Catholic Theology after Vatican II*, in: *The Modern Theologians*, David Ford and Rachel Muers (eds.), Malden/Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 265-286.

² For example: Erik Borgman, *The Rediscovery of Truth as a Religious Category. The Enduring Legacy of the Second Vatican Council*, in: *Bulletin ET* 17 (2006) 53-66, p.2.

political engagement, hermeneutics and interdisciplinarity have not prevented and have perhaps even encouraged the ongoing marginalisation and fragmentation of theology at Europe's universities.³ How, then, do we assess theology's present situation in view of its recent developments and challenges?

To evaluate theology's current state of affairs in the light of its modern legacy, I suggest we ask ourselves the questions below about the *contexts*, *themes* and *approaches*, *theologians* and *paradigm* of Catholic theology in Europe.

A) Context(s) and culture(s)

In which cultural context does contemporary European theology evolve? To which events and situations should theologians respond? In the past few decades, postmodernity, secularisation and religious diversity have inspired and challenged theological discussions and they will continue to do so in the near future. These discussions have become part of a public debate that has a much wider audience than church and academy alone. What could and should theology's distinctive voice be in that public realm? Speaking from, for and to present-day culture, in what sense could and should that theological voice be considered as being exclusively of the church?

B) Theological themes and approaches, and themes for theology

What do we consider to be the central themes of post-Vatican II- theology? A whole range of ethical and political issues have topped the theological agenda in the past few decades. To mention but a few: poverty, gender, biotechnology, war and violence. Until today these issues have pressed further reflection on the church's ecumenical policy, social doctrine and political responsibility. New or newly discovered approaches and disciplines have come up, like aesthetics, anthropology, comparative and empirical studies. In Catholic theology especially, fundamental theologies and reflections on method have been dominant in the eighties and nineties. Currently, perhaps plurality and secularity are theology's main concerns, which ask for new forms of faith, spirituality and religious life. *Which themes and approaches are or should be at the forefront of the study of faith in Europe today?*

³ Cf. Helmut Hoping, *Universität ohne Gott? Theologie im Haus der Wissenschaften*, Freiburg: Herder, 2007.

C) Theologians

Who do we consider to be the voice of contemporary Catholic theology? In the early seventies the most influential theologians seemed clearly divided along the Concilium-Communio divide, with Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Marie-Dominique Chenu and Hans Küng on the so-called revisionist or liberal side, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger, Walter Kasper and Henri de Lubac on the postliberal or orthodox side. *What is their legacy? How does this political division still affect theology today?* Since then, very few individual theologians have had a similar impact on the development of theology, with perhaps some notable exceptions like Jon Sobrino, David Tracy or Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. But which names in Europe spring to mind? No doubt, several names should be mentioned here, but apart from the fact that the face of theology becomes less shaped by particular individual theologians, it must also be acknowledged that every theological sub-discipline or school will recognise its own set of influential thinkers. Is this cacophony of voices a problem for European theology, and if not, *who from theology's recent past could be considered a guide that conducts these new voices through Europe's culture of diversity?*

D) The question of a paradigm

Finally, *would it be possible to outline a paradigm for Catholic theology in Europe today?* A thought-pattern, so to speak, that is at work as a unifying force in the diversity of theological ideas and styles, which restructures itself with every emerging theological response to reality and which continuously needs to be questioned as a unity to accommodate anew the truth that lives among human beings. A paradigm that not only reflects on the shared and interconnected concerns of both church and society, but also proves able to critically engage with the methodological and strategic demands of contemporary science and the humanities. A paradigm that is both the result and the opportunity of performing theological conversation and debate with integrity, thus becoming a sign of present-day faith itself, which is critically engaged with the tradition it represents and thoroughly grounded in a world that it considers to be the place and prospect for divine presence.

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SACRAMENTALITY, INCARNATION AND GENDER
A Proposal for an Integrated Theology as a Criticism of Hans Urs
von Balthasar

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This short paper could be described as a quest for an integrated Catholicism – a Catholicism which continues to celebrate the liberalizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council, while seeking to rediscover aspects of the mystical, Marian dimension of the Church which many would argue were depleted by the more rationalized and worldly vision which emerged during the Council.⁴

The papacy of John Paul II brought into sharp relief a crisis which had been simmering since the Council. On the one hand, there were those who enthusiastically embraced the new social vision of a church in conversation with the world, eager to be seen to embrace ‘The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age.’⁵ On the other hand, there was growing discontent among those who mourned the loss of the sacramentality and mysticism of the pre-conciliar rite in favour of what they saw as an excessively politicized process of modernisation. To quote Hans Urs von Balthasar:

What can one say of ‘political theology’ and of ‘critical Catholicism’? They are outlines for discussion for professors of theology and anti-repressive students, but scarcely for a congregation which still consists of children, women, old men, and the sick ... May the reason for the domination of such typically male and abstract notions be because of the

⁴ This paper is an abbreviated version of a longer paper, *From Rosaries to Rights – Towards an Integrated Catholicism*, in: Bernard Hoose, Julie Clague and Gerard Mannion (eds.) *Moral Theology for the Twenty-First Century: Essays in Celebration of Kevin Kelly*, London and New York: T & T Clark, 2008, forthcoming. The ideas explored here are more fully developed in Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

⁵ Pope Paul VI, ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*’, December 7, 1965, n. 1, on the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (last accessed 4 January 2008).

abandonment of the deep femininity of the marian character of the Church?⁶

The realization that the sacramental life of the Church may have been depleted by the reforms of the Council is no longer confined to conservatives, and not everybody would agree with von Balthasar that 'political theology' is necessarily in conflict with the 'marian character of the Church'. The American feminist Charlene Spretnak criticizes post-conciliar 'progressive' Catholics for their ongoing resistance to the mystical holiness of the Marian tradition. She cites her parents as examples of many pre-conciliar Catholics whose devotion to Mary went hand in hand with the kind of political ethos that informs post-conciliar liberal Catholicism. Spretnak describes the Catholic Church as 'a container and guardian of mysteries far greater than itself,'⁷ and she writes:

Today, the theology and liturgy of the Catholic Church is less 'cluttered,' less mystical, and less comprehensive in its spiritual scope. Its tight, clear focus is far more 'rational' but far less whole. We who once partook of a vast spiritual banquet with boundaries beyond our ken are now allotted spare rations, culled by the blades of a 'rationalized' agenda more acceptable to the modern mindset.⁸

As a radical feminist, Spretnak speaks from the opposite end of the theological spectrum to the kind of Catholicism represented by von Balthasar and the journal *Communio*. However, any move towards reconciliation between these polarized positions requires recognition of the risks as well as the riches of a sacramental tradition, replete with nuptial and sacrificial imagery and redolent with a sublimated sexuality, in a Church which has never, in its two-thousand year history, learned to cope well with human sexuality and desire. The reason why there is an apparent stand-off between liberals and conservatives around these issues may be because the attempt under John Paul II to reinvigorate the Church's Marian life was deeply influenced by von Balthasar's theology. Paul McPartlan observes that 'Balthasar's Marian and Petrine terminology has passed into the official documents of the Catholic Church in recent times, indicating

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations* [Translated by John Riches] London: SPCK, 1975, p. 70. It is interesting that von Balthasar groups women with children, old men, and the sick, over and against professors of theology: professors of theology include an abundance of old men and even a few women.

⁷ Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church*, New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4.

that it is his thought that is particularly driving the Church's understanding of sexuality in relation to witness and ministry in the Church.'⁹

Some would argue that von Balthasar is the Catholic Church's response to feminism. For example, referring to Adrienne von Speyr, the married woman in whose home von Balthasar lived for fifteen years and who had a profound influence on his theology, Johann Roten writes: 'If feminist concerns are not merely a matter of hierarchic functional uniformity, then the example of Hans Urs von von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr could be a challenging illustration – not necessarily to be copied as such! – of the best possibilities the Church has to offer to men and women, granted that both be shaped and permeated by the common fundamental Marian personality structure.'¹⁰

Those who promote von Balthasar's theology identify a number of significant features which they argue offer an effective Catholic response to the challenge of modern culture, philosophy and social and sexual ethics. He has been celebrated as the theologian of beauty because of his emphasis on the significance of beauty in all its cultural and artistic forms as revelatory of God. His theology of the body has been praised because he offers an ostensibly incarnational, gendered theological vision in which the dynamics of the Marian and the Petrine church are reworked in conversation with the revelatory significance of the sexual body. His interpretation of *kenosis* has been identified as one of the most significant of his theological insights, and his comprehensive engagement with European literature, philosophy and theology has been hailed by some as a profoundly integrated theological vision capable of reinstating the Catholic faith at the very centre of the human story.

However, my own reading of von Balthasar leads me to a deep suspicion of his whole theological enterprise, and I would argue that those who praise his 'feminism' lack even a rudimentary grasp of fundamental feminist principles which would be shared by a diverse range of feminist theories and theologies. First, a close reading reveals that von Balthasar's theology negates rather than affirms the significance of female embodiment and sexuality. 'Woman' is a disembodied concept in von Balthasar's theology, primarily associated not with

⁹ Paul McPartlan, *The Marian church and women's ordination*, in: William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (eds.) *Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, Leominster: Gracewing: 1997, p. 51.

¹⁰ Johann Roten, S.M., *The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, in: *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, David L. Schindler (ed.), San Francisco, CA: Communio Books, Ignatius Press, 1991, pp. 85-86.

the bodily female subject but functioning as the other to the male – the answer to his question and the fulfilment of his desire. Following on from this, von Balthasar's insistence on the all-pervasive significance of sexual difference means that the subject of his theology is male – for if sexual difference is as significant as he claims, then every theological claim and argument has to acknowledge the duality of the human sexual subject. Insofar as he fails to do this, von Balthasar fails to acknowledge woman as a valid subject of theology, and to read him as woman is to identify the gaps and inconsistencies in his theological enterprise. Third, and as a result of this negation of the subjective significance of the female body, there are undercurrents of misogynistic violence in his theology which make it profoundly worrying from the perspective of its significance for the sacramentality of the body and with regard to the ethical relationship between the sexes.

My task in the limited space available here is that of briefly calling into question von Balthasar's rhetoric, not of presenting his theology *per se*. So let me begin with a quotation from an early work, *Heart of the World*, written soon after the beginning of his relationship with von Speyr, when von Balthasar writes about *kenosis* in the context of a nuptial ecclesiology. Here, in a chapter titled 'Conquest of the Bride', Christ addresses the Church:

I, the strong God, have betrayed myself to you – my Body, my Church ... this simmering darkness, opposed to the Father's light; ... I dared to enter the body of my Church, the deadly body which *you* are. ... No wonder you realized your advantage over me and took my nakedness by storm! But I have defeated you through weakness and my Spirit has overpowered my unruly and recalcitrant flesh. (Never has woman made more desperate resistance!) ... Our wrecked covenant – our blood-wedding, the red wedding of the Lamb – is already, here and now, the white bridal bed of divine love.¹¹

Kenosis, then, is the final overwhelming of a strong, masculine God by the seductions of the sexual female flesh. Christ enters that flesh as an act of marital rape. I do not need to spell out the implications for ecclesiology, Christology and the theology of marriage.

I often quote that passage because for me it effectively sums up why von Balthasar's theology is so dangerous for the spirituality of *eros* and for the representation of women in the Church. However, I have been asked if I risk taking passages out of context – particularly since this is an early and immature

¹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World* [Translated by Erasmo S. Leiva], San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1979, pp. 194-197.

work. Yet I would argue that this dynamic of sexual violence is a persistent theme running through his theology, and once one becomes attentive to it, it becomes almost inescapable. To give another example, let me turn to his account of Christ's descent into hell.

On Holy Saturday, von Balthasar sees 'the idea of a *struggle* between the divinity which descends into the underworld, and the power hostile to God which is vanquished there and must yield up either the menaced or imprisoned divinity itself, or some other prey.'¹² What is this power that is hostile to God, that imprisons God and must be vanquished, so that, in the Resurrection, 'a voracious power is obliged to recognize its impotence to hold its prey'?¹³ Von Balthasar argues that, in hell, Christ enters 'the second 'chaos'', 'the pure substantiality of 'Hell' which is 'sin in itself'.¹⁴ He goes on to search for images that might express something of the nature of this Hell that is the very substance of sin. He refers to 'mud', 'ordure', 'leprosy', 'phlegm' and, in apocalyptic imagery, to 'the great harlot of Babylon, as quintessence of the sin of the world' which is burned up in fire and smoke.¹⁵ I am not going to inflict that whole ugly passage on readers, but we should note that, in von Balthasar's imagery, the incarnation is God being overwhelmed by the sexual female flesh, and the resurrection is the final burning up of the harlot body which held the dead Christ imprisoned. Elsewhere, he describes the Word coming from the Father into 'a menacing void, a chasm fitted with teeth. The light came into the darkness, but the darkness had no eye for the light: it had only jaws.'¹⁶ The raped bride, the incinerated harlot, the *vagina dentata* – *kenosis*, Holy Saturday and sexuality, these are the great insights which von Balthasar offers to the modern Church, a daily diet of misogyny and violence on which our young seminarians are now being fed, given that von Balthasar is the theologian of choice in many seminaries.

But of course, ask any theologian worth his salt, and he will say that I am reading von Balthasar too selectively. Yes, there are times when his choice of rhetoric is a little unfortunate, but every theologian slips up occasionally. The fact that he is occasionally a little over the top in his sexual imagery does not mean we should write him off altogether.

¹² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* [Translated by Aidan Nichols, O.P.], Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990, p. 151.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 173.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 173-4.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 39.

Since publishing *New Catholic Feminism*, in which I offer an extensive critique of von Balthasar's theological imagery, it is interesting how much feedback I have received from women who have had a similar reaction to mine when reading him, but who have felt unable to admit to this because of his great influence on contemporary Catholicism. But one of the more disturbing aspects of my experience of researching von Balthasar has been the uncritical engagement of many theologians with his work, which has led me to wonder how some of the finest theological minds in the modern Church are so anaesthetized to his pervasive rhetoric of sexual violence and misogyny. Perhaps the most startling example of this blindness is a paper by Aristotle Papanikolaou published in *Modern Theology*, in which he argues that, in situations of sexual abuse and violence against women, von Balthasar's 'understanding of *kenotic* personhood is the most adequate way to account for the healing of abused victims.'¹⁷ It is hard to square this with my own reading of von Balthasar, which at times felt like being exposed to rhetorical acts of sexual abuse.

Those who translate and write about von Balthasar are mostly male theologians, but he has a growing following among women as well. They are developing what they call 'new Catholic feminism', based on Pope John Paul II's call for women to discover a new feminism which would celebrate feminine genius rather than modelling itself on aggressive patterns of masculinity.¹⁸ The new Catholic feminists offer an uncritical affirmation of the theologies of both John Paul II and von Balthasar, and they are deeply antagonistic towards other feminisms on issues of sexual and reproductive rights, being anti-contraception, anti-abortion and anti-homosexuality.

If we want to see a healthy integration between sacramentality and ethics, uniting spirituality, sexuality and social justice, then we need to go beyond a church with dark secrets and unacknowledged desires, a church where the mysticism of the liturgy has the potential to unleash a cauldron of unconscious fears and fantasies, a church in which too many of our priests become sexual predators because they have never been given the insight they need with regard to understanding their own desires. Von Balthasar would in my opinion be an ideal choice for the sex education of priests if he were read against the grain – as an example of what can go wrong when these questions are not addressed in a

¹⁷ Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Person, Kenosis and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation*, in: *Modern Theology*, Vol. 19/1 (January 2003) 41-65, p. 42.

¹⁸ See the essays in Michele Schumacher (ed.), *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004.

spirit of honesty and self-awareness. But when his theology becomes the narrative which shapes our understanding of priesthood, personhood, gender and God, then I am afraid for the Church and for the next generation of priests.

Questions of sexual rights are among the most challenging facing the Church today. On issues of social and economic justice, the Catholic Church is living out her mission to the poor in a radical way. The Church's social teaching champions the cause of human rights and, since the collapse of communism, offers the only sustained and coherent critique of global capitalism and its consequences. But an integrated Catholicism requires no less courage in the face of the new sexual and psychological questions facing humankind at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Christ brings life incarnate to our desire. He offers us *eros* beyond *thanatos*, liberating us from deadly desire in order for us to enter into loving exchanges marked by mutual self-giving, trust and commitment. We achieve that, not by aspiring to 'supra-sex' (to use von Balthasar's expression) above and beyond the body's vulnerabilities and yearnings, but by learning to express our sexuality in relationships focused on the delight of the beloved other. A sexuality which is truly a giving of self is an abundant, bodily, creative love, an expression not of sacrifice but of incarnation. In a century which has begun in a blaze of violence, can the Church reclaim the mystical beauty of the Catholic tradition within an encompassing vision of peace, sacramentally nourished and ethically expressed in a new relationship between Church, body and world such as that envisaged by the Second Vatican Council?

The growing popularity of von Balthasar is a reactionary trend which suggests a reluctance to rise to the challenge this poses. Yet the Council made it possible for the Church to accommodate within her theological boundaries a range of different voices which were emerging during that liberating era of the 1960s – from the voices of postcolonial peoples to the voices of women and sexual and racial minorities. No single authoritarian voice can silence this plurality which constitutes the postmodern Catholic theological landscape. The challenge is to interpret these voices as a symphony of hope, an expression of a Church which may seem institutionally moribund and yet which has perhaps rarely been more robust in its popular energy and dynamism. The genius of our Catholic faith has always been its sacramental capacity to incarnate its doctrines within the plurality of human cultures and identities. Today, the question of the sacramental significance of the female body is one of the most urgent and radical facing the Church. If we are to respond to that challenge, then we need to risk a new encounter between sacramentality and sexuality, nurtured in the matrix of a

Church which celebrates the fecundity and diversity of human life, not in the context of a narrow reproductive ideology, but in the context of a lavish affirmation of incarnation, life and love in a world increasingly surrendered to the forces of nihilism, violence and despair.

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DESIRE AND GRACE

The Importance of Karl Rahner's Theology in Today's European Culture

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I very much feel that Karl Rahner lived in another time than we do today. Rahner passed away only 23 years ago, so he should be very much a theologian of the present. Yet reading his texts gives the distinct feeling that they speak to a context and a situation that is mostly past.¹⁹ Rethinking Rahner and taking up the lasting aspects of his thought in today's European context is a challenge that is still open.

Rahner's thought is bound to the specific setting of German post-Vatican I Catholicism: the break-up of what Rainer Bucher has called with reference to Michel Foucault the 'Dispositiv der Dauer'²⁰ – the catholic milieu with its closed social cosmos, which integrated church and a general social contact, doctrine and *Weltanschauung*, liturgical cycles and every day life. This context created strong dissociations between the church and today's world, tradition and modernity, grace and nature, right and wrong. All these dissociations were very much stabilising a disjunction of the Catholic Church from modern society, the latter seen as being beyond salvation. Yet in the second half of the twentieth-century it became very clear that the medieval power of Christianity would not be restored. The great achievement of Rahner was to develop a positive understanding of modern society in a theological way – and formulating this understanding within the framework of the prevalent Neoscholastic theology. He perhaps found his theoretical foundation at the very beginning of his career in one single thought, the rediscovery of the 'uncreated' grace'.²¹ Neoscholastic

¹⁹ I have analysed Rahner's role in this context with help of the method of genealogy used by Michel Foucault, vgl. Peter Hardt, *Genealogie der Gnade. Eine theologische Untersuchung zur Methode Michel Foucaults*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005.

²⁰ Vgl. Rainer M. Bucher, *Kirchenbildung in der Moderne: eine Untersuchung der Konstitutionsprinzipien der deutschen katholischen Kirche im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln: Kohlhammer, 1998.

²¹ Vgl. Karl Rahner, *Zur scholastischen Begrifflichkeit der ungeschaffenen Gnade*, in: *Ders., Schriften zur Theologie I*, Einsiedeln-Zürich-Köln: Benzinger (1954) 81967, 347-375.

manuals since the reformation had been pre-occupied with two sub-forms of 'created grace' ('actual' and 'habitual' grace). As such 'created grace' means the consequences of the arrival of God in our human existence. In contrast 'uncreated grace' is God himself, not just the impact of his presence. By reinforcing the patristic idea of God himself being the salvation of man in the concept of 'uncreated grace', Rahner established within the Neoscholastic framework the idea of a direct, unmediated relationship between God and man as the centre of salvation. God's grace is his self-revelation to every human being, even if it is not recognised as such. The consequences of this mind-shift could not be exaggerated: the order of creation and the order of salvation are no longer dissociated. Directly within creation, salvation has its place in human existence. In the secular world and beyond the social realm of the church, God's grace is at work. The opposition of the church to modernity and secular spaces does not need to be kept up.

The Catholic Church has since moved on and is no longer the same. We are at a different place today. What of Rahner's theology if it is to stay with us? What aspects are suitable for the future of European theology? I think, the first and most important aspect of Rahner's thought is *his desire to include*. Here we find a timeless theological aspiration grounded in God's love of every human being and the trusting hope that God's grace will reach its goal with everyone, even where people are beyond the social reach of the church and the word of the gospel. Rahner included the secular in the realm of grace, he included those that think they have to become modern atheists, and he included believers from other religious traditions. This will to include has lasting relevance for a church that is always in danger of focussing too much on its exclusive role in the plan of salvation and that is tempted to form elitist groups for the promotion of the gospel (and thereby contradicting the gospel).

A second aspect that I feel is important is the pastoral grounding of his systematic theology. Rahner thought and spoke with a deep pastoral intention, which was recognised by the lay audience that sometimes struggled to understand the complexity of his language and philosophical argumentation. Rahner wrote for modern Catholics, who were deeply rooted in their Christian tradition and also children of their time, taking part in the dynamics of modern economics, mobility, sciences and living in a pluralistic society. Rahner thereby acted as an example of what theology needs to master: to be rooted in the practices of everyday life of the people of God and at the same time to speak at the level of academic discourse.

After mentioning two aspects of Rahner's thought that might have a lasting impact on future European theology, I would like also to draw attention to two other aspects, that – I think – will not last beyond Rahner.

First, the Neoscholastic framework to which Rahner's thought and language are very much bound. Rahner developed his ideas within this Neoscholastic framework; his theology of grace, notions like *potentia oboedientialis*, *pure nature* or *uncreated grace* were centrally inspired by a Jesuit Suarezian theological education. Even where Rahner differs from the Neoscholastic framework, his thought needs to be understood with it in the background. On the one hand this strict adherence to the Neoscholastics made the great impact of his thought possible, because Rahner's concepts were placed within a well-protected doctrinal discourse and thereby allowed – as it were – doors to be opened from the inside. On the other hand, for us who come after the fall of Neoscholastic theology, some aspects of Rahner's concepts and language seem strange. There is no longer any popular understanding of these concepts, even among young theologians, which are required as an important prerequisite to really understand Rahner. The Neoscholastic aspects in his work remind us ever more that Rahner has started to move from being a theologian of the present to a theologian of the past.

The second aspect that has rightly been criticised by many others (e.g. Johann Baptist Metz) is the missing systematic consideration of contexts for the gift of grace. As already mentioned Rahner's focus has been on the direct and unmediated relationship of every human to God, who gives himself in an anonymous revelation. This relationship does not require any conscious opening to grace and it is not influenced, corrupted or lost by any circumstances. Yet this thought is rather counter-intuitive – is it really completely irrelevant for salvation if I am a man or woman, if I have access to economic resources, if I spend my time in digital spaces, if I live in a dictatorship or democracy, and so on? By implying this, Rahner risks turning grace into a something remote that is not in touch with 'real life' – which is exactly the opposite of his intention. Rahner's aim was to get away from the Neoscholastic emphasis on a supernatural salvation, that does not influence this life but only the after-life. But being too idealistic, not sufficiently engaged with the importance of social contexts for the constitution of subjects, his theology is in danger of neglecting those contexts that have a significant influence on the self-perception of being 'saved' and being 'within the grace of God'.

The challenge will be to re-think Rahner within certain specific contexts. I would like to suggest one opportunity to do so by looking at the role of freedom within grace. First of all Rahner recognised the inevitability of freedom in modern society and, by implication, for modern Catholics. The freedom to participate in the life of the church was for him not only a prerequisite for thinking theologically. What is more, he asserted freedom as the essential gift of the grace of God – against an anti-liberal church that saw freedom only as a freedom to sin. Yet his affirmation of freedom – absolutely adequate in his own context – might be too unconditional if we look at it from the perspective of 'postmodern' society, from the perspective of those living just a few decades later. I suggest that freedom today also needs to be looked at as a part of consumer society and the role of desire in it.²² Zygmunt Bauman has indicated in his analyses of Western society that we have moved from techniques of domination built on suppression to techniques of seduction. In a liberal society people's freedom is addressed by economic strategies based on desire: 'In the field of the politics of desire, agencies vie with each other for the scarce resource of the individual and collective dreams of the good life. The overall effect of the politics of desire is heteronomy of choice.'²³ This good life is very much associated with goods and driven by advertising. To say as Rahner does that grace means the freeing of freedom, could be gravely misunderstood in this context to mean freely living out any desire and understanding it as a gift of grace. Freedom in its connection to desire is ambivalent. This ambivalence is also reflected in contrasting theological traditions, regarding desire on the one hand as *desiderium naturale*, the desire for God himself as the fulfilling abundance of existence, the longing to see God face to face; and on the other hand as *concupiscentia*, the tendency to fleshly sin, the sign of the brokenness of human existence in relation to God. Both understandings presuppose one idea: the absence of God. Desire is a reaction to a lack, to the awareness of something missing. In the thought of Michel de Certeau desire could be seen theologically as deeply rooted in the absence of the salvific presence of God, the longing for salvation. Although it is ambivalent, desire might be seen as the most obvious sign of the vocation of man. Desire, much as it can corrupt and mislead, might also be the gift of grace, the longing that makes us search for God and that drives our actions and leads us into discipleship. The theology of grace today could and

²² I have done this in larger extent in the final chapter of my dissertation: Peter Hardt, *Genealogie der Gnade. Eine theologische Untersuchung zur Methode Michel Foucaults*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005.

²³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 199.

should be a theology of the good life that teaches us how to deal with freedom in the light of our ambivalent desires, the life that endures the absence of God, leading to the desire for salvation.

Rahner has given a brilliant and timeless example of how to think along with the signs of the time. Even more important than the content of his contribution to theology was his gesture of thought. To rethink Rahner in today's context is a challenge that is still open.

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A CHURCH OF AND FOR THE WORLD

Marie-Dominique Chenu's Heritage as a Challenge to Contemporary Theology*

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The term 'nouvelle théologie' (New Theology) is a battle term.²⁴ At least, that was the case for a large part of the 20th century; more exactly, the period between the middle of the 1930s and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The term 'nouvelle théologie' first surfaced in 1948. An article about new trends in theology appeared in the semi-official Vatican newspaper 'Osservatore Romano' on 10th February, 1948. The author of this article, Mgr. Pietro Parente, later chosen to be a cardinal, described a French variant of the theology of that time, a variant which had been objected to by Rome since 1936, as 'nouvelle théologie'.²⁵ In the following period, 'new theology' became the accepted term used to describe this particular theological trend.

1 Intellectual roots of the 'nouvelle théologie'

It is well known that no theology has yet fallen down straight from heaven. Rather, the following is the case: all theologies are historically dependent. Their coming into existence and their passing away are both located in a historical context.

But it was precisely this thesis about which the argument about modernism turned. Looked at in terms of intellectual history, the great question in the 19th century was about *history*. For theology the question can be formulated as

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²⁴ More detailed cf. U. Engel, *El debate en torno a la „nueva teología”. Una comprobación histórico-teológica en perspectiva dominicana*, in: *Ciencia Tomista* 97 (2006), 125-140.

²⁵ Cf. P. Parente, *Nuove tendenze teologiche*, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1942-02-10.

follows: How can a particular (or limited) event of history gain universal (or general) significance? Put in other words: How do the so-called 'eternal truths' of the Christian faith incarnate themselves in a history of the world and of humanity which is subject to continual change?

At the beginning of the 20th century, two attempts to answer this competed with one another. Whilst the one side propagated a strict *division* between faith and the world, the other side attempted to build a bridge between the two. The former position was rooted ultimately in the Council of Trent (1545-1563); this first Council of modern times had attempted to separate itself from modernity. The latter ecclesiastical position – so-called 'modernism' (incidentally, this word was originally an insult from the opposing side) – relied, in contrast, on *dialogue* with the modern world.

2 The contribution of Chenu and 'Le Saulchoir' to the 'nouvelle théologie'

The new theological movement had its origins in France and in the French-speaking part of Belgium. In this connection, the French Dominicans had been leading the way not only in theology but also in pastoral work since the end of the 1920s. The location of their contribution to the new theology was the Dominican House of Studies at 'Le Saulchoir'. From here, the Dominicans participated in an epochal historical upheaval, which shook the theoretical foundations of the Church and of theology and precipitated a general change of mentality. This undertaking achieved a visible expression in the programmatic document published in 1937 'Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir'.²⁶

In opposition to this little document, which was based on a speech held in Le Saulchoir in 1936 by Marie-Dominique Chenu – he was at that time rector of the studium – the magisterium soon opened proceedings. 'In February, 1938, Chenu was summoned to Rome and – to prove his orthodoxy – had to give his signature to ten theological theses without adding any commentary to them (no-one knows who drafted them).'²⁷

²⁶ M.-D. Chenu, *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir. Avec les études de G. Alberigo, É. Fouilloux, J. Ladrière et J.-P. Jossua*, Paris: Cerf, 1985.

²⁷ J. Bunnenberg, *In den Fängen des Hl. Offiziums. Die düsteren Jahre des Dominikaners Yves Congar*, in: *Wort und Antwort* 44 (2003), 19-24, p. 20f.

The first thesis, drafted in Latin, read as follows: ‘Dogmatic formulas express a truth which is absolute and unchanging.’²⁸ A comparison makes clear how much these theses were contrary to Chenu’s theological convictions. I recall the first thesis once again – concentrating particularly on the terms ‘absolute’ and ‘unchanging’ – and contrast this with a quotation from Chenu’s congenial introduction to the work of St. Thomas. Pay particular attention to his speaking about the ‘conditions’ as ‘means of access to that truth’ and to the word ‘historical’. The first thesis was ‘Dogmatic formulas express a truth which is absolute and unchanging.’

Chenu’s response:

This whole work is based on the conviction that the works of a genius, in terms of their truth content and, therefore, in the understanding that we can gain from them, are closely linked with the society in which they have their roots, and can bear fruit over and beyond this society itself. There is no cleft between the spirit of inner truth and the conditions for confirming it, but rather, on the contrary, a constant interpenetration to the advantage of both of them. These conditions are, therefore, a real means of access to that truth, which does justice to the organic coming into being of that which is historical as well as the eternity of that which is true.²⁹

In 1942, the Holy Office put ‘Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir’ on the Index of forbidden books. Chenu always took up a clear position in the theological dispute. His ‘thesis of dogma in the middle of history’³⁰ means (in contrast to the Roman position³¹) that dogmatic truth as such is eternal, but that the eternal salvation of humanity is being realised in history.³²

²⁸ Facsimile of the theses in: M.-D. Chenu, *Une École de Théologie: Le Saulchoir*, p. 35.

²⁹ M.-D. Chenu, *Das Werk des hl. Thomas von Aquin (DThA, Erg.-Bd. 2)*, Graz – Wien – Köln, 1982, p. 18.

³⁰ H.J. Sander, „Die Zeichen der Zeit erforschen...“ *Die Bedeutung französischer Theologie für das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, in: U. Franke-Hesse and G. Kruip (eds.), *Kirchliches Leben und Theologie in Frankreich. Dokumentation der Fachtagung in Kooperation mit der Arbeitsstelle für Jugendseelsorge zur Vorbereitung des Weltjugendtages in Paris 1997* [KAJ Schriftenreihe Vol. 5], Odenthal-Altenberg: Katholische Akad. f. Jugendfragen, 1997, 25-47, p. 35.

³¹ Cf. as an example of this, the encyclical ‘*Humani Generis*’, which was aimed, amongst other things, at the *Nouvelle théologie*, with which Pius XII. in 1950 turned those who ‘want to reduce to a minimum the meaning of dogmas’ (DH 3875-3899, here 3881).

³² Cf. M.-D. Chenu, *Leiblichkeit und Zeitlichkeit. Eine anthropologische Stellungnahme*, hrsg. vom Institut M.-Dominique Chenu – Espaces Berlin durch Ch. Bauer, Th. Eggensperger, U. Engel [Collection Chenu vol. 1], Berlin, 2001, p. 44.

As a Dominican who commuted across the boundaries between faith and time, Church and world, dogma and pastoral work, Chenu was carrying on a ‘theology of incarnation’.³³ It gained its creative originality in the unity of tension of historical consciousness and being contemporary. And the dispute about the full-of-tension determination of the relationship between Church and world has lasted until today. And, just as in the Middle Ages, the crucial question at the beginning of the 21st century is as follows: Pure and unblended or related to the world and incarnated?³⁴

3 The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

In 1962 the Second Vatican Council took up its work in Rome. Chenu was able to get onto the stage of the Council as the personal consultant of a Bishop of Madagascar. Chenu worked there mainly behind the scenes – yet with great effect! Two texts, ‘The Message to Humanity’ by the Council Fathers (1962)³⁵ as well as the Pastoral Constitution ‘Gaudium et spes’ (1965) both show clear signs of Chenu’s handwriting. Two short extracts from these texts are quoted here:

*Message to Humanity*³⁶ (extract): In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ. We shall take pains so as to present to the men of this age God’s truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and gladly assent to it... Coming together in unity from every nation under the sun, we carry in our hearts the hardships, the bodily and mental distress, the sorrows, longings, and hopes of all the peoples entrusted to us.

³³ Cf. C. Geffré, *Théologie de l’incarnation et théologie des signes du temps chez le Père Chenu*, in: Le Centre d’études du Saulchoir (ed.), *Marie-Dominique Chenu: Moyen-Âge et Modernité*, Paris 1997, 131-153.

³⁴ Cf. in more detail on this: Ch. Bauer, Th. Eggensperger, and U. Engel, *Geschichtsbewusstsein und Zeitgenossenschaft. Eine historisch-theologische Einführung in Band 1 der Collection Chenu*, in: M.-D. Chenu, *Leiblichkeit und Zeitlichkeit*, pp. 16-18.

³⁵ Second Vatican Council, *The Message to Humanity (Nuntius ad universos homines)*, in: AAS 54 (1962), 822-824.

³⁶ Part II (*Illuscescat facies Christi – May the Face of Christ Jesus Shine Out*) and IV (*Caritas Christi urget nos – The Love of Christ impels us*), quoted from W.M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, London – Dublin: Guild Press, 1966.

Gaudium et Spes 4 (extract): To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.

These two Council texts represent in a material way the new framework of Church practice which was set by the Council from the ground up.³⁷ Arising out of the direct dynamics of the Council itself, both stand as examples of this ‘Concil à la dimension du monde’ (Chenu). Both texts have as their subject, and, at the same time, achieve, a ‘Copernican turnaround’³⁸ of the Council towards the world. In the words of Chenu: ‘No longer did the world revolve around the Church...but the Church revolved around the world.’³⁹

4 Conclusion

This world is a world that is disparate, both spatially and in time, characterized by differences and contradictions. It is a world understood in the plural: as ‘worlds’. Singleness is no longer discernable. Like Thomas Aquinas before him, Chenu recognized the stature of this particular world. A theology of incarnation, such as Chenu developed, seeks to find ‘God’s hidden presence’ within concrete historical processes, ‘to show that the longed-for Unity already exists, if in hidden manner.’ Once the historical evidence of the dispersion and differences within postmodern culture is recognized and accepted as belonging to God’s intention for this world, it becomes possible to perceive Christ’s manifestation within it. This is Chenu’s legacy for the twenty-first century.

Ulrich Engel

³⁷ Cf. M. Heimbach-Steins, *Erschütterung durch das Ereignis (M.-D. Chenu). Die Entdeckung der Geschichte als Ort des Glaubens und der Theologie*, in: G. Fuchs and A. Lienkamp (Hrsg.), *Visionen des Konzils. 30 Jahre Pastoralkonstitution ‘Die Kirche in der Welt von heute’* [Schriften des Instituts für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften vol. 36], Münster: LIT Verlag, 1997, 103-121, p. 104f.

³⁸ M.-D. Chenu, *Ein prophetisches Konzil*, in: E. Klinger and K. Wittstadt (eds.), *Glaube im Prozeß. Christsein nach dem II. Vatikanum (FS K. Rahner)*, Freiburg/Br. 1984, 16-21, p. 17.

³⁹ Ibid.

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WHOLE CHURCH CATHOLICISM AND LOCAL ECCLESIAL COMMITMENT

Contemporary Catholic Theology in the UK Context

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A number of the other contributions to this discussion are in the form ‘Theology After X’, whether Rahner, Schillebeeckx, von Balthasar etc. I have been asked to do something slightly different: to reflect on key figures and movements of thought in recent UK Catholic theology and to ponder what is of continuing significance in this regard. In contrast to the other figures discussed in this collection, the most influential of recent UK Catholic theologians are, with the notable exception of the late great Herbert McCabe, O.P., very much a living presence. Even in the case of McCabe, the years since his death have seen the publication of several volumes of collected writings. Because of this the notion of doing theology *after* these key influences rather than alongside them – either in their light, or their wake, depending on one’s choice of metaphor – seems somewhat premature. As the characteristic nose-twitchingly incisive contributions of Nicholas Lash to the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain testify, the grandees, the founding generation of the Association are still very much amongst its most significant representatives. Also included here, of course, are other hugely influential figures such as Eamon Duffy who, along with a handful of other UK revisionist historians, has helped to revolutionise the way in which the English Reformation and the place of Catholicism within it is understood. Similarly, mention would have to be made of Fergus Kerr OP, widely regarded as one of the foremost Catholic philosophical theologians in the English-speaking world today and certainly its master story-teller and commentator, as exemplified by his recent works on *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism and Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*.⁴⁰ For their own part, although pursuing a somewhat different trajectory, significant influence has also been exerted over the last twenty years and more – and well beyond the leafy groves of academe – by a number of UK Catholic

⁴⁰ Fergus Kerr OP, *After Aquinas*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002; and *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

theologians who have variously pursued the relevance of liberationist, feminist and ecological theologies to the UK context. Most notable here, amongst a considerably larger cast, are Mary Grey and Ursula King.

I will start out by saying a few words about some of the aforementioned before broadening out to comment a little on some of the more significant personae and developments amongst the younger generation of UK Catholic theologians. Beyond this, I will focus also on the institutional context of Catholic theology in the UK as I believe that this, in many respects, represents the most significant contribution that UK Catholic theology has to make to contemporary Catholic theology more broadly. The recently deceased Anglican theologian, Daniel W. Hardy, writing in the second edition of David F. Ford's influential collection, *The Modern Theologians*, refers to the UK as having become a centre for lay Catholic theology;⁴¹ one, we might add, that is largely free of the polarised acrimony and institutional tensions that mark Catholic theology in some other contexts. Particularly notable here is the well established, hospitable home that critically committed Catholic theology has come to find – unforeseeable, I would suggest, even twenty-five years ago – within the state-funded and owned, pluralist, public academy. The potential that this distinctive space affords deserves attention; not least in relation to the question as to how it might best be consolidated and developed as a vital resource for the church both nationally and internationally.

As regards founding grandees and key figures, as good a starting place as any here is with the Slant group of Catholic theologians and intellectuals of the 1960s, including amongst its ranks Adrian Cunningham, Nicholas Lash, Herbert McCabe, Brian Wicker and the cultural critic and theorist, Terry Eagleton. To draw upon an appropriate Wittgensteinian image, the family resemblances between these thinkers included a shared commitment to a robust if sensitive appropriation of Aquinas, in turn shaped by close engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and left-wing political, particularly Marxist, theory. In relation to the first and second of these concerns at least, a certain resonance might be heard with the work of Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Winch. Similarly, strong resonance exists between the second and third concerns and the work of the Cambridge-based, Scottish Episcopalian philosophical theologian, Donald MacKinnon. If McCabe's writings most consistently manifest the interweaving of these three concerns, the clearest

⁴¹ See Daniel W. Hardy, *Theology Through Philosophy*, in: David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell, ²1997, 252-85, p. 284, n.114.

subsequent expressions apiece of UK Catholic engagement with Wittgenstein and Marx are Fergus Kerr's *Theology After Wittgenstein* and Nicholas Lash's *A Matter of Hope*.⁴²

As is particularly evident in McCabe and Lash, perhaps the long-term significance of the *Slant* thinkers – continuing long after the *Slant* project itself ran out of steam – lies in the way in which they served helpfully to muddy the waters, in the UK context at least, around too-neatly drawn notions of liberal, or progressivist, and conservative. In common theological parlance, 'liberal' standardly refers not simply to theological creativity but to the specific dissolution of core doctrinal commitments – the incarnation, for example, as with *The Myth of God Incarnate* theologians of the 1970's⁴³ – and, with this, to the ready embrace of prevailing norms of thought and practice as an uncriticised basis ('foundation') for theological work. In contrast, with McCabe and Lash we have theologians of avowedly, if richly and creatively, orthodox doctrinal persuasion; theologians committed to mining the tradition in its depth and breadth both for the resources for that tradition's own healing and re-expression, and in the service of transformative engagement with contemporary culture and society.

I am reminded here of a comment made by Clifford Longley of Karl Rahner, writing in *The Tablet* almost twenty years ago, to the effect that Rahner is ultimately better understood as a liberal Conservative than as a conservative Liberal.⁴⁴ The conviction is that it is the tradition that is creative; the tradition that is radical. The point is neither to reject nor to foreclose the tradition but to be, we might say, radically traditioned and from that particular place of confidence, creativity and resource to pursue myriad engagements with contemporary intellectual, cultural, scientific, political and ecclesial issues. In this, Lash and McCabe might be thought of as exemplifying a form of Catholic 'postliberalism' before George A. Lindbeck gave such influential articulation to the notion in his groundbreaking 1984 text, *The Nature of Doctrine*.⁴⁵ In turn, their writings provide a model of good practice; a certain tone and attitude of

⁴² See Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, London: SPCK, 1997 [1986]; Nicholas Lash, *A Matter of Hope: A Theologian's Reflections on the Thought of Karl Marx*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981.

⁴³ See John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM, 1977.

⁴⁴ See Clifford Longley, *Review of John Habgood, Confessions of a Conservative Liberal*, London: SPCK, *The Tablet*, [10th December 1988], 1428.

⁴⁵ See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox & SCM, 1984.

mind that in varying ways continues to characterise the broad mainstream of contemporary UK Catholic theology.

To take three relatively random examples: the deeply theologically resourced manner in which Janet Soskice pursues her engagement with gender studies;⁴⁶ Gerard Loughlin's sensitive theological readings of film;⁴⁷ and Gavin D'Costa's articulation of a genuinely particular and diverse, genuinely plural, approach in the theology of religions in place of the universalising reductionism of secular pluralism.⁴⁸

In some ways related to this muddying of the waters and holding together of the virtues of theological robustness and theological challenge and creativity – the supposedly opposed instincts of the conservative and the progressivist – is the fact that Catholic theology in the UK does not split entirely neatly down clear theo-political divides of Rahnerians and Balthasarians. Sure, there are notable scholars of each – Philip Endean, Karen Kilby and Lash himself in terms of the former and Francesca Murphy and Aidan Nichols in terms of the latter. With the latter, sharp criticism can also be found; see, for example, Tina Beattie's passionate critique of Balthasar's theo-erotics.⁴⁹ But there is also a concern at issue in the work of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain and in the writings of such as D'Costa, Loughlin and Oliver Davies variously to hold in conversation aspects of both Rahnerian and Balthasarian instincts; to pursue what we might call 'whole church Catholicism'; to be open both to the need to renew Catholic faith and practice in the light of what can be learned on occasion from resources outside the church and to seek to offer back a richer understanding than the world can achieve simply on the basis of such resources.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See Janet Soskice, *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990; *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁴⁷ See Gerard Loughlin, *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

⁴⁸ See Gavin D'Costa, *John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988; *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.

⁴⁹ See Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory*, London: Routledge, 2005.

⁵⁰ For one such attempt to articulate a theological ethic in service of 'whole-church Catholicism', see P. Murray, Roman Catholic Theology After Vatican II, in: David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 265-86.

Within an orientation towards such ‘whole-church Catholicism’ it is equally important to hold together clear ecclesial commitment and appreciation – loving acknowledgment of a richness to be conserved in its fullness and communicated in its appeal – with humble, honest self-criticism and self-examination – loving cognisance that individually, collectively, and institutionally we fall short of that which we are called to be; of that which by grace we already are, in part at least, sign and sacrament. Such a stance requires both the most refined critical expertise to be acquired through professional academic training and practice and for these skills to be resituated, re-orientated, redeemed, in the context of a committed ecclesial passion. In this regard, it is notable that a very considerable number of UK Catholic theologians are engaged in the service of church and the practical shaping of church in various explicit ways. To take four current examples: the Receptive Ecumenism project operating out of Durham University, the Ecclesiological Investigations Network under the leadership of Gerard Mannion, the activities of the Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life at Heythrop College and, similarly, the Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, also at Heythrop.

Turning from the ethic and values that characterise a healthy ‘whole-church Catholicism’, let us briefly consider the various institutional contexts in which UK Catholic theology is currently being pursued and the respective opportunities, possibilities and responsibilities such contexts pose. Quite apart from the myriad different personal contexts in which individual theologians might be working, academic Catholic theology in the UK is currently being pursued in what might be regarded as five related but also distinct institutional contexts.

First and most obvious are the seminaries, some of which, such as Ushaw College, Durham, have developed outreach programmes for lay formation and on-going clergy formation and so act as significant regional resource centres beyond their original seminary function.

Second, perhaps, are the Catholic colleges of higher education, originally established as teacher training colleges, some of which, as in Liverpool and Roehampton, have grown through partnership with other institutions into full universities in their own right but with varying degrees of continuing Catholic ownership. Whereas, on the plus-side, Catholic trusteeship and explicit relationship with the Catholic Education Service serves to ensure a clear ecclesial identity, it also opens the way to potential tension if, for example, and as has happened, episcopal trustees should object to an institution hosting a speaker who is not in good-standing with the church.

Third is Heythrop College, the specialist college of theology and philosophy of the Society of Jesus that is a full constituent member of the collegially organised University of London and which stands, perhaps, as the jewel in the crown of UK Catholic theology.

Fourth are the three surviving Catholic Private Halls of the University of Oxford (Campion Hall, Blackfriars and Benet Hall). These are Catholic-owned institutions where students live receive tutorial assistance, whilst studying at the university alongside other students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Analogous in some respects here is the Margaret Beaufort Institute (for women) at Cambridge, with the distinction that the majority of students will be studying within the theology and ministry programmes of the Cambridge Federation of church and religious institutions.

Fifth is the phenomenon, steadily gathering pace since the late 1970s and early 1980s, of Catholics studying and teaching, now in very considerable numbers, within the many and various departments of theology and religion of the entirely state-funded and state-owned, pluralist, public universities. As a glance at the staff lists of the relevant departments indicates, the days of the all but exclusively Anglican, and certainly broadly Protestant, establishment within UK theology are well and truly passed. Indeed, it is now difficult to think of a single department of theology and/or religion within the UK that does not include Catholic theologians amongst its ranks and, in some cases, in significant numbers – Bristol, Cambridge and Durham particularly so. Far from being a marginal presence, Catholics are now fully a part of the UK academic theological establishment, welcomed and respected by colleagues from across other traditions and perspectives.

Each of these contexts brings with it distinctive opportunities and benefits. In the latter regard, for example, Catholic theology can be pursued alongside and before the face of other traditions, other academic disciplines and the total range of modes of analysis that rightly needs to be brought to bear on the critically constructive study of theology. With this, Catholic theology here benefits from the fact that in this context there are no questions that are ruled out of court as illegitimate and no issues that cannot be pursued as a matter of principle. As such, the pluralist, public academy can – somewhat ironically – allow much-needed space for a critically committed theology that can be pursued with ecclesial passion and in service of the church, but free from its control and the consequent narrowing of possibility and imagination that can arise in Catholic institutions. This is the kind of space for faithful exploration that the health of

the church itself desperately requires but which the church, for entirely understandable reasons, can find so difficult to sustain of its own resources.

Moreover, it is notable that, thus far, this significant development in the UK theological academy has occurred without deliberate planning. It is, we might say, a graced happening. Be that as it may, it is, nevertheless, I would suggest a happening that now brings with it responsibilities for its nurture, stability and development. Such responsibilities range from the need for effective focussed chaplaincy provision for students and teachers of theology working in this context – bearing in mind that the now typically lay profile of such students and staff means that they do not have routine access to a formal programme of spiritual formation to complement their academic studies – through to a responsibility to capitalise on these developments and the distinctive opportunities they afford and to seek to give to them long-term stability.

For our own part at Durham University, we have sought to do this by raising the necessary endowment to establish in perpetuity the Bede Chair of Catholic Theology – the UK's first such endowed chair of Catholic theology in the fully public academy – together with the Durham Centre for Catholic Studies. By doing so, our aim is to ensure for the long-term a visible, protected space for critically committed Catholic theology within the mainstream of the UK academic community as a resource for the Catholic community nationally and internationally.

The temptation for theologians, as for all intellectuals, is to think that the hard labour of conceptual re-imagining, testing and scholarly exploration is all. For Christian theologians, however, it is vital that we constantly recall that we are situated in a tradition focussed not upon an idea, a theory, or even, simply, a word spoken but upon a 'deed', a life lived, an act performed.⁵¹ Within this perspective, the institutional responsibility that seeks to create and nurture the contexts in which the health of the church can be served through critical, constructive, theological exploration is not merely ancillary to the work of theology proper. Such responsibility is itself already a performance of theology in its ministerial mode; in service, at once, of the good of the church, the aims of the academy and the well-being of society.

⁵¹ See D. M. MacKinnon, *Prayer, Worship, and Life*, in: D. M. MacKinnon (ed.), *Christian Faith and Communist Faith: A Series of Studies by Members of the Anglican Communion*, London: Macmillan, 1953, 242-56, p. 246.

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EUROPE'S CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE AND ITS FUTURE The Contribution of Edward Schillebeeckx

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1 Schillebeeckx' distinctive voice

The English title of the second volume of Schillebeeckx's Christological trilogy – consisting also of *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (1974) and *Church: The Human Story of God* (1989) – reveals a central aspect of what Schillebeeckx's theology is about: *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (1977).⁵² It is not just that Schillebeeckx focuses on the Christian experience of life. According to Schillebeeckx, Christ - the Lordship of Jesus, the revelation of him being Gods *icon* - is present in and discovered through human experiences in the modern world. We see here a relation between Schillebeeckx and Chenu. Ulrich Engel has presented Chenu's theology as based on incarnation, meaning that God can and should be found in his connection to⁵³ the world and within the world.

Schillebeeckx built on Chenu's historical concretization. He analyzed how this view was present in Jesus' history and in the first developments of the Christian faith right after the resurrection. In contrast to Hans Küng, for Schillebeeckx⁵⁴ the historical Jesus is not the sole criterion of everything we can say and believe as Christians. In fact, Schillebeeckx's point is exactly the opposite: we could and should discover new things about God and our lives in the light of God, by living in the Spirit of Jesus and his *abba*. At the same time Schillebeeckx

⁵² The full bibliography of Edward Schillebeeckx, including his books and articles in translation, is to be found at <http://rome.hosting.kun.nl/schillebeeckx/default3.asp?i=persoon&m=algemeen&t=nl/>.

⁵³ For the connection between Chenu en Schillebeeckx, cf. my *Edward Schillebeeckx: a Theologian in his History*. Part I: *A Catholic Theology of Culture (1914-1965)*, London etc.: Continuum, 2002. For Chenu's vision on incarnation and its influence on Vatican II and its adagio in *Gaudium et Spes* that the church has to read the signs of the times, cf. my *The Rediscovery of Truth as a Religious Category: The Enduring Legacy of the Second Vatican Council*, in: *Bulletin ET* 17 (2006) no. 2, 53-56.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hans Küng, *Christ Sein*, München/Zürich: Piper, 1974.

analyzed the world as a place where Christ could be and in fact is present, not in the first place through the Church, but in creation and human history, to be seen and sacramentally represented by the Church. This is a very important and distinctive point. In Schillebeeckx's view faith is *not* in the first place a thing of the human subject. It is not a decision or a special feeling of something that is the ultimate foundation of human subjectivity and freedom. In other words, Schillebeeckx is not Rahner or in any sense a Rahnerian.⁵⁵ For Schillebeeckx faith is a response to God who is present to us in the world, God's creation and in and through the salvific history in and after Jesus Christ.

This is ultimately why – according to Schillebeeckx's view and according to my view – theology can be an academic discipline. God is not just there for those who believe in God. God is there for all human beings and all human beings respond to God's presence, even if they do not speak about the presence of God. Therefore, we can discuss what is the best response, the religious, the Christian, or some other. And each can learn from the other.⁵⁶

2 Theology's distinctive voice in the public realm

Given the inheritance of Schillebeeckx, what then should theology's distinctive voice be in the public realm? First it is clear that theology *should* indeed be present in the public realm and that its rationality should be a public rationality. The distinctive voice of theology should be that it does not buy into the modern idea that the public sphere - and in the end reality as it is common to all people and is analyzed and can be understood by the sciences and the other academic disciplines - is religiously empty. Therefore, we should not believe in secularization in the sense that our contemporary culture is beyond religion. We should not believe in secularization's optimistic nor its pessimistic varieties, the latter being the quietly dominant understanding in the Church and theology nowadays, which suggests that the only way to rescue the contemporary world is

⁵⁵ It is no coincidence that to Rahner the concept of reading the signs of the times was at best dangerous, at worse mistaken; cf. H.J. Sander, *Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute Gaudium et spes*, in: P. Hünemann/B.J. Hilberath (eds.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* [Band 4], Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2005, 581-886.

⁵⁶ For this view on theology as a discipline, cf. my *Want de plaats waarop je staat is heilige grond: God als onderzoeksprogramma*, Amsterdam: Boom, 2008.

by restoring its ties with the Christian tradition.⁵⁷ Fundamentally speaking, there is nothing to restore because there is nothing broken. God is with us even if we do not want to be with God. Of course it changes our lives and our relation to this world once we see this, but this change is a response to something outside us. We should, in the end, not believe in the movement that localizes all meaning and knowledge and sense and religion in the human subject as something added to the objective world. Religion in general and Christianity in particular suggests that meaning can be found in the world and therefore can be part of our natural understanding and knowledge.

I would, therefore, argue that – in accordance with Vatican II – the signs of the times should be at the forefront of the study of faith in Europe today. Places – following Hans Joachim Sander who here follows Michel Foucault, I call them heterotopias – where new forms of faith reveal themselves.⁵⁸ Places where faith is contested and discussed, and thus where the question becomes urgent again: what and whom should we trust? This implies that theologians should be involved in research and debates about new forms of faith, new religious expressions, new ways in which human beings apparently become aware that ultimately they are not self-reliant, but dependent. Theologians should be involved in this more than they generally are right now. It is revealed time and again to people that the whole of reality is dependent on what keeps it in existence, and it is on these revelations that theologians should focus. It also implies that theologians should look under the surface of what people say they think about still hidden forms of God's liberating presence and about hidden forms of pseudo-religion, pseudo-redemption and about false gods that we have to criticize.⁵⁹

There is, for example, at the core of our secularized culture, a religious presence in the way we collectively and individually want to sacrifice our own freedom for the human dignity of the other, in our awareness that we are responsible for one another and have to take care of the sick and poor and the weak. Here we do in fact make what I consider to be the ultimate religious gesture: we bow or kneel to something that we know we depend on.

⁵⁷ It is clear that this is also the position of the theologian Joseph Ratzinger. It remains to be seen that it is the position of pope Benedict XVI.

⁵⁸ Cf. H.-J. Sander, *Einführung in die Gotteslehre*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006, 31-37; cf. M. Foucault, *Des espaces autres*, in: M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, Tome IV: 1980-1988, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 752-762.

⁵⁹ For an attempt to do all this, cf. my *Metamorfosen: Over religie en moderne cultuur*, Kampen: Klement, 2008.

Finding traces of God through identifying and researching traces of the religious in this sense, that is to my mind the theological mission of the moment. And we should do this publicly. The Western world, and especially Western Europe, seems to be in the process of re-inventing itself, vehemently debating its core values and core beliefs. Theologians should be part of this debate. Not that the world depends on what we bring into reality but because it is our responsibility to show to others what we think and see. Both to help others to see better and to help ourselves to see better. The democratic debate confronts our ideas with thoughts and insights we could never come up with ourselves. Thus, the democratic debate is the way in which we ‘assist one another in the quest for truth’.⁶⁰

3 How to build a future for theology?

For many, the heyday of theology is over. There seems to be no new generation of theological giants like Metz and Rahner, Küng and Schillebeeckx, Gutiérrez and Sobrino. However, one of the reasons why I find Edward Schillebeeckx sympathetic, apart from his being a brilliant theologian, is that he never seems to have seen himself as a star or to have behaved like one. This suggests that the focus on individual theologians in recent generations had a lot to do with the social situation theology was in. Theologians acted as the intellectuals of the Church, or for certain groups of Catholics, but these groups do not exist any more at least in the Western world.

Hence, what we will have to do as theologians is to find our place, mark out our position in the contemporary academic, cultural and societal landscape where fixed borders of traditions, of religious and ideological groups, and of disciplines are dissolving. Our future will not reside in a clear theological identity, but in a dynamic theological contribution to general cultural, social and academic debates. I am not even certain that we need a new theological approach or a new theological paradigm. What we should not do, however, is engage ourselves in endless debates about what could and should be the way forward, what a new paradigm for theology might look like. Instead, we should show each other how we are in fact re-inventing our discipline and developing a way forward. In this process we could and should, of course, debate whether this

⁶⁰ Cf. Vatican II’s declaration on religious liberty *Dignitatis Humanae* (7 Dec. 1965), no. 3.

really is a way forward, but new theological paradigms are not invented out of the blue. They evolve by responding to ‘real challenges’.⁶¹

To do this fruitfully, we need to display two attitudes that prove to be not easy to combine. We need solid solidarity, based on the firm conviction that theology is important, especially in the contemporary situation – and that the right answer is not to give up theology and change to the sciences of religion. And we need at the same time frankness and sometimes even fierceness in the debate about what should be done and why, and whether our proposals are any good. As I said, it is not easy to combine the two attitudes, but if we want a future for theology, this is what we have to do.

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⁶¹ ‘Real Challenges’ is the title of a series of one day conferences with international scholars on challenges in the contemporary world for theology, organized by Stephan van Erp.